

## Feeding according to development level

Developmental level is more relevant than age when considering feeding abilities of children with physical and developmental delays. This table outlines oral motor skills and appropriate foods according to 6 developmental stages, based on the typical acquisition of oral motor skills for feeding. Use this to identify a child's current stage based on their oral motor skills and provide guidance, set goals and monitor progress on developmentally appropriate foods.

Chewing pattern	Developmental stages	Typical age	Oral-motor skills	Appropriate food texture and liquid consistency
Suckle/suck	1	Before 4 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses a suckling/sucking pattern</li> <li>• Tongue thrust is still present                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Child will push thick liquids/purees or solid food out of their mouth with their tongue</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liquids (e.g. milk or formula) by breast or bottle</li> </ul>
	2	4-6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses a sucking pattern</li> <li>• Tongue thrust reflex starts to disappear</li> <li>• Mouth opens when spoon approaches</li> <li>• Begins to transfer from the front of their tongue to the back to swallow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smooth pureed foods (e.g. applesauce, yogurt, pudding)</li> </ul>
Suck/munch	3	7-9 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Up and down munching pattern for chewing emerges</li> <li>• Tongue thrust reflex starts to disappear</li> <li>• Begins to use lateral tongue movement to control the position of the bolus in the mouth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gradually thicker and thicker smooth purees (without introducing chunks)</li> <li>• Begin using crunchy dissolvable solids to develop chewing skills (e.g. rice rusk)</li> <li>• Begin using well mashed table foods of a single consistency (e.g. mashed banana)</li> </ul>
	4	12-14 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uses a munching pattern for chewing but a rotary chewing pattern (diagonal movement of the jaw) emerges</li> <li>• Lateralizes tongue well to position food in the mouth for chewing</li> <li>• Lips are open and active during chewing which may cause the child to lose some food/liquid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begins to eat finely chopped food and small pieces of soft table food</li> <li>• Continues to develop chewing skills using dissolvable solids (e.g. cereal rings, crackers, digestive cookies, toast)</li> </ul>
Munch chew	5	14-18 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rotary chewing pattern continues to develop</li> <li>• Able to take a bite of food and use the tongue to move the bolus to:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ both sides of the mouth</li> <li>▪ the centre of the mouth</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Better able to keep lips closed while chewing but there is still some loss of food/liquid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eats bite-sized pieces of soft foods such as:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ easily chewed meats, soft vegetables and fruits, soft pasta</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Difficulty with combinations of textures (e.g. cereal with milk, soup with noodles)</li> <li>• The child may swallow the solid portion whole and/or lose liquid from the mouth</li> </ul>
	6	18-24 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rotary chewing pattern is well established</li> <li>• Good lip closure while chewing and swallowing (there is no loss of food/liquid from the mouth)</li> <li>• Can grade jaw opening when biting foods of different thicknesses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chews and swallows table foods, most meats, raw fruits and vegetables, breads, rice</li> <li>• Able to manage combinations of texture</li> </ul>

